

Keeping Baby Healthy:

Jaundice in babies

What is newborn jaundice?

A yellow color in your baby's skin and eyes might mean your baby has newborn jaundice. The yellow color comes from a chemical called bilirubin. Jaundice can occur in babies of any race or color.

When babies are born, they do not need as many red blood cells as they did before they were born. Baby's liver gets rid of extra red blood cells in the first few days after birth. Once the liver processes the old red blood cells, the waste products go into the baby's stools.

A part of the old red blood cells is called bilirubin. Sometimes it is hard for the liver to get rid of old red blood cells quickly. When this happens, bilirubin builds up in the baby's blood, making his skin yellow.

Many babies have jaundice. In most babies, it is mild and goes away in a few days. However, jaundice can be a problem sign in some babies. Your baby's doctor or nurse will tell you what you need to do to help your baby.

How can I tell if my baby has jaundice?

Take your baby into daylight in a sunny room. Look at your baby's face and eyes. Do they look yellow? If they do, your baby might have jaundice.

What do I need to do if I think my baby might have jaundice?

Call your baby's nurse or doctor. He or she might want to see the baby. Sometimes a blood test is needed to check a baby's bilirubin level. If your baby has a lot of bilirubin in her body, the baby might need special treatment.

How is jaundice treated?

Your baby's doctor or nurse will tell you what your baby needs.

Some of the things you may be told to do are:

- Undress your baby. Put baby in a warm, safe place in a sunny room. Don't let the sun shine right on baby's skin or eyes.
- If the bilirubin level is high, baby can be treated with a special type of light. The light helps the body get rid of the bilirubin.
- Breastfeed your baby eight to 12 times every 24 hours.
- If you are bottlefeeding, give your baby a bottle every two to three hours. Your baby should take 20 to 24 ounces of formula every 24 hours.

Your baby should wet a diaper every two to three hours.

Newborn babies have many bowel movements. During the first few days the stools are dark green or black and sticky. The bowel movements help get rid of the bilirubin from the old red blood cells. Keep your baby's skin clean and dry after diaper changes.

Be sure to take your baby back to see the nurse or doctor if they ask you to bring the baby back for a recheck.

Call baby's doctor or nurse if:

- Your baby's skin or eyes look like they are getting more yellow.
- Your baby is not wetting diapers as often as usual.
- Your baby is not having bowel movements as often as usual; your baby's stomach, arms or legs are yellow; or the whites of your baby's eyes are yellow.
- You have problems getting your baby to eat.
- Your baby's urine looks very dark.
- Your baby's stool looks pale.
- Your baby is hard to wake up.
- You have questions or concerns.

